

Green Flag Marking Policy

Purpose

1. The UK Quality Code of Higher Education issued by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education states:
 - HE providers should operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment which enable every student
 - The nature of assessment should enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes
 - Feedback on assessment is timely, constructive and developmental
 - Assessment tasks should provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement
2. One of the diagnostic criteria for a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) is a significant discrepancy between potential and performance. The University of Buckingham must ensure that students who have been diagnosed with a SpLD are not left at an unfair disadvantage.
3. The aims of this policy are to provide a clear, transparent and practical policy framework relating to the marking and assessment of coursework and examinations submitted by students who have been diagnosed with a SpLD.

Terminology

4. Green Flag marking is the process of marking students according to their ability to demonstrate an understanding of the subject matter of an examination or assignment, using an appropriate academic style.
5. The Specific Learning Difficulty DfES Guidelines (July 2005) state that SpLDs should include the following:
 - Dyslexia
 - Dyspraxia/Developmental Co-ordination Disorder
 - Dyscalculia
 - Attention Deficit Disorder, with or without Hyperactivity
6. There is considerable overlap between the characteristics of these four conditions.
7. In general, students with SpLDs have particular difficulties, which may include spelling, acquiring fluent reading and writing skills and/or manipulating numbers with the effect that their performance is well below their abilities in other areas. They may also have problems with working memory, organisational skills, receptive and expressive language, oral and auditory skills, maintaining concentration and coordination.

Context and Legal Framework

8. It is likely that there are at least 10% of students with SpLDs at the University of Buckingham in any given intake. Some of these students will have been diagnosed prior to starting their studies, while others recognise that they have difficulties once they embark on their course.
9. Although Reasonable Adjustments (e.g. extra time, allocation of rest breaks, allocation of a scribe or reader, etc.) are designed to ensure that students will not be at a disadvantage during examinations, without Green Flag marking it remains possible for students with SpLDs to be discriminated against. Such students may never be able to produce work to the same standard, having particular regard to spelling and/or grammar, as fellow students without SpLDs, irrespective of the amount of additional time or other examination concessions allocated.
10. The Disability Discrimination Act(s) (DDA) 1995 and 2005, and the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 as amended by the Equality Act 2010 places a duty to make Reasonable Adjustments and to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to ensure that students with SpLDs are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to other students.
11. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 placed a duty on the University to publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES). Among its actions, the DES proposed to make staff disability awareness training mandatory, as well as to improve facilities and services for disabled students and staff. This duty has been amended by the Equality Act 2010 and the University will incorporate these actions into the University's Single Equality Scheme objectives.
12. Since one of the diagnostic criteria for a SpLD is a significant discrepancy between potential and performance, it is important that we recognise the support that students will require to enable them to reach their full potential. Academic staff may identify a mismatch and should advise a student to contact the Disability Support Officer¹.

Applicability and Scope

13. Green Flag marking does **not** aim to encourage leniency; should **not** compromise academic standards; and does **not** replace the marking criteria for individual modules.
14. This policy applies to students who have been identified by the University's Disability Support Officer¹ as being formally diagnosed with a SpLD which will affect their writing skills.
15. Except in certain subjects, no form of penalty whatsoever should be applied for poor spelling, poor grammar or 'awkward' sentence structure, where the student's meaning is clear and there is no interference in the reader's ability to understand what the student has written.
16. In subjects where accuracy in writing is one of the assessment criteria, this will be stated along with potential effect on marks. In these circumstances, students with a SpLD may be penalised for inaccurate writing. However, this should only happen where accuracy in writing is deemed to be an **integral part of the learning outcomes**.
17. Not every student with a diagnosed SpLD will want, or require, the use of the Green Flag marking.

18. Some eligible students may choose to use the Green Flag on only some types of assessment.

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19. Students recognised by the Disability Support Officer¹ as being formally diagnosed with a SpLD which will affect their writing skills will be offered the access to Green Flag marking.
20. The student will indicate on their work that they are eligible for Green Flag marking before the work is submitted for marking.
21. Green Flag marking principles will be applied when marking any assessment where spelling, punctuation and grammar are not assessment criteria.
22. If spelling, punctuation and grammar are assessment criteria, students will be made aware of this in advance. If it is not mentioned in the marking scheme, it will be assumed that they are not marking criteria and that the student need not be penalised if they are eligible for Green Flag marking.

Responsibilities – before marking

23. The Disability Support Officer¹ will issue the eligible student with Green Flags². A Green Flag² will include the following information:
 - Student's name
 - Student's ID number
 - Confirmation from the university's Disability Support Officer that the student has a formal diagnosis of a SpLD which will affect their writing skills. The Disability Support Officer will also specify which type of SpLD has been diagnosed (e.g. 'dyslexia')
24. The student will attach a Green Flag² to their work before it is submitted for marking.
25. To ensure anonymous marking, the student's name and ID number will be removed by school secretaries/administrators before the work is passed to academic staff for marking.
26. Students submitting work using Turnitin will have the option to electronically³ apply a Green Flag².

Responsibilities – Marking and feedback

27. Where spelling, grammar and punctuation are **not** an integral part of the learning outcomes:
 - Academic staff will focus on the clarity of the argument rather than the details of expression.
 - Academic staff will assess ideas, understanding and knowledge rather than errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Students will not be penalised for poor spelling, poor grammar or awkward sentence structure where the meaning of the work is clear and there is no interference in the reader's ability to understand what is written.
 - Academic staff will take into account:

- The SpLD student may have a different learning style to their studies compared to those without.
- The SpLD student may use a holistic, visual approach and/or auditory approach for example, rather than an analytical approach
- The SpLD student may have difficulty differentiating ideas, understanding, knowledge, grammar, spelling and/or punctuation errors
- In most formal examinations, an SpLD student will have much less time for planning, no access to spellcheck or assistive software and no ability to re-order work if handwritten
- It can be demoralising for an SpLD student to see numerous corrections; simply correcting spelling, grammar or punctuation will not improve understanding about how to use these
- Students who have SpLD find it difficult to 'read between the lines'
- A student who has SpLD is unlikely to know how to correct or improve an error without some guidance, model or explanation; they do not usually retain grammatical terms or rules
- Where a student has dyscalculia alone, academic staff will apply the marking guidelines only to those aspects covering use and application of number.

28. Where spelling, grammar and punctuation **are** an integral part of the learning outcomes, the number of marks that can be lost for these will be stipulated by the marker and a small sample of the students' text is selected and commented upon.

29. In **all** cases,

- Students will be informed if the standard of their written work needs improvement
- Feedback will be given in a straightforward and accessible manner, with positive and constructive comments exemplified to facilitate understanding and improvement.
- If academic staff decide to flag spelling, grammar and punctuation they will not point out every error. Instead, they will select and state the major problem e.g. 'too few sentences'.
- Academic staff will explain what is required and what went wrong at an early stage.
- Academic staff will use clear, explicit English avoiding ambiguity and complex sentence structure.
- Academic staff will avoid using grammatical terms, as these may be a barrier to understanding the advice.
- Academic staff will offer the student an opportunity to discuss feedback on a one-to-one basis.
- When using Turnitin³, academic staff will:
 - Highlight areas of the original script (in a choice of maybe 2 colours) and make comments that can be seen by 'hovering'. These comments are always in blue.

- Make notes directly onto the script as opposed to using numbered notes (where the student has to flick back and forth between the note and the index number). The tutor needs to select T in order to do this. Comments are always in blue.
- Use the General Comments which can be generated at the end. They will explain the colour code used through the marking and separate comments clearly into those associated with clerical errors (spelling, punctuation, grammar, writing structure, vocabulary) from those to do with the student's understanding, interpretation and critical comment (the academic part).

Other adjustments

30. Green Flag Marking is not intended to replace other types of SpLD-related adjustments. It is only one of a range of adjustments a student may be entitled to access. For example, students may also need additional time in exams.
31. Any need for other reasonable adjustments will be identified by the university's Disability Support Officer¹.
32. The reasonable adjustments commonly provided may not suffice in such cases to provide appropriate support. Alternative forms of assessment may be considered in a very small number of cases where students are severely affected by dyslexia or by dyslexia occurring in conjunction with other SpLDs/disabilities. For example, a student may benefit from an oral (viva voce) examination rather than a written examination or written assignment.
33. In order to determine whether an alternative form of assessment is appropriate, it is imperative to consider the learning outcomes that are being assessed. If a student needs to demonstrate the ability to produce a well-structured written argument, an oral examination would not be appropriate. Both the needs of the student and the maintenance of academic standards (in particular, any professional requirements) must be taken into consideration. The student must be given (a) clear and unambiguous reason(s) for either arranging or not arranging an alternative assessment. Alternative assessments should always be discussed with the Disability Support Officer Officer¹.

Further Reading

Equality Act (2010) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>)

Equality and Diversity Policy, University of Buckingham
(<http://www.buckingham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Equality-and-DiversityPolicy.pdf>)

Managing Reasonable Adjustments in Higher Education, Advance HE
(<https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/managing-reasonableadjustments-in-higher-education.pdf>)

What are reasonable adjustments? Equality and Human Rights Commission
(<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/what-are-reasonable-adjustments>)

¹ *The phrase 'Disability Support Officer' may be updated to specify other university staff.*

² *'Green Flag' refers to a physical cover sheet or sticker.*